

When The LORD Raised Up Judges

Judges 2:18

Intro

We want to think a bit about Judges 2:18,

“When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.”

Judges 11 began a section where we have an increasingly details and forceful view of Israel’s faithlessness, despite being in the Promised Land and enjoying the blessings promised in the Old and Palestinian Covenants. Chapter 2:1 actually gives a fairly dramatic statement of the growth and increasing seriousness of Israel’s disobedience.

2 *Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: “I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. (Judges 2:1)*

Verses 2-3 speaks clearly of the fact that they were forbidden to make any covenants with the people of the land, this following His statement there at the end of verse 1 that He “will never break My covenant” with them. The end of verse 2 introduces the first ominous tone to the discussion.

“...you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? ³ Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’ ”

It seems that the Israelites either did not realize or did not choose to observe the seriousness and reality of what God had told them. For some reason they thought that they would be “OK” in spite of their pursuing their own course in the land. Yet it is clear that the state in which we find them very soon after Joshua died (2:7-10) was one that was pretty much what God, via the Prophet had said would follow their disobedience.

We’re told a good bit about the general nature of Israel’s disobedience in verse 11ff.:

1. They did what the writer calls “evil” in a general sense (11a)
2. In connection with that, we’re told they “served the Baals” that had been worshipped by those who were in the land upon Israel’s entrance.

3. The writer tells us that they “*forsook*” the LORD God of their fathers, doing so in spite of all of the wonderful and powerful things that He had done for them in their exit from Egypt.
4. We’re also told that they “*followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them*”.
5. We must note also that it was not just a matter of “*following*” these “*other gods*” which were the people’s gods in the land. We’re told that they were influenced to the extent that they worshipped (“*bowed down to them*”) them instead of the Lord Who had done so much for them in addition to both warning them of the coming danger and then forbidding them so to do.
6. Yet another thing was that they in turn “...forsook the Lord” in the way and manner in which the worshipped. This is very significant as they allowed themselves to led to indulging in forms and processes that God found repugnant.
7. It was not simply that they gave themselves over to false worship, but that embraced and thus “served” Baal and the Ashtoreths, the “gods” of the land. A terrible offense to God.
8. We should also note that this is an example of people who call themselves God’s people accommodating and then conforming themselves to the manner and style of worshipping that the people around them use.

¹² and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³ They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

It is quite clear that none of this pleased God to even the slightest degree. In fact, reading the following and the rest of the coming context in the Book of Judges, that recurrence after recurrence occurred as Israel seemed either unable or unwilling to obey and to submit themselves to what they well knew was God’s desire for them and their behavior in the land. Verse 14 carries this truth out for us:

¹⁴ And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵ Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

The content of the entire Book of Judges is one long display, occurrence after occurrence, of this very behavior. It is significant, and frightening in a very serious way, to note that the writer of the Book says that the “anger of the Lord as ‘hot’ against Israel. There are a couple of things to consider here:

1. The “anger” is a word with severe meaning.
 - We have said in other studies it speaks of an emotional experience that is severe and that often demonstrates itself in, what is its literal meaning, “darkening of the face”.
 - Surely this is an anthropomorphism as God has no human face to darken, but it does make the thing very graphic and helps us to understand just what the writer is trying to get across.
 - I expect that we ought to remember that God and His anger both “felt” and exercised in an holy and righteous fashion. He does not, despite his anger being “hot” lose control and demonstrate it any more than is proper and just as humans do.
2. We should see that it is “anger of the LORD”
 - To take the above thought and think through it a bit further, we recognize that it is the anger of just and righteous God and thus is both an anger to be understood and, to say the least, be avoided at all costs when possible.
 - This, I think is one of the great lessons of this Book. It shows us that it is unwise in quite a few ways and for a number of reasons to draw the Lord into a place where Him, because of His nature will surely act in this anger.
3. The writer also tells us that it “was hot”
 - The anger of the LORD is not just to be seen as a “stern talking to”! Nor is it a matter that can be either ignored or borne in order to get ones’ way. It is an anger can and often, in Biblical times, did happen in a severe and terrible fashion.
 - We need to remember that the anger of God is not a solely past thing. Though, surely, the anger of God against the sin nature and guilt of man must be allowed and, more, acknowledged as true.
 - Just as a note, this “hot anger” of our God is one of the things about which the world most often objects to. We quite frequently hear of this “violent” and “blood thirsty” God as a cruel and hateful Deity that gives only evidence that He is NOT to followed rather than a loving God Who OUGHT to be submitted to. It is interesting that these unthinking and terrible unbelievers even place the coming, life and sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ as the act of a hateful and merciless God Who even sent His own Son to His death.
 - The outrageous and deliberate blindness and virtual atheism is astounding. Paul said, in Romans 2-3 that ALL men have, from their birth (their conception actually) a knowledge of the existence of God and of their accountability to Him. Yet, sadly, so many people refuse to follow that innate awareness and pursue after Him as He is so willing to reveal Himself to them. It is true that man, but nature, is rebellious and seeks his own desires as an expression of that rebellious and wicked nature.

- Such it was with Israel, as shown here in Judges 2 and in the rest of the Book.
4. This anger was “against” Israel
 - Of course, we know that Israel was the Covenanted people of God. We also know that, despite their terrible sin and ongoing refusal to obey and do as they well knew God wished for them, honoring His as their Father and Master. They understood that the LORD was the Sovereign one of the Universe and that there was every reason for them to obey. But, when Israel did not, God, not intending to sever His relation with His Covenant people, still was willing to exercise His righteous and Just nature and was required to exercise chastening and at least a measure of judgement upon them. He didn’t cast them away, but, rather, kept them as His own and fought to train them and lead them in the path of righteousness, for His Names sake. Certainly, there was anger involved, but God, be Who He was and what He was like could neither destroy them or leave them to their wicked pursuits.
 5. There were consequences that were a function of that disobedience and offense to God.
 - Throughout the Book of Judges we see that there, again and again as Israel lapsed into disobedience and the reaped the results, the just consequences of those actions. Often, this realization was that which caused them to look, at the very beginning as if God had, indeed abandoned them. But realistically, what consequences would not suggest that very thing?
 - Somehow, in this day and age we see that so many that number themselves as a part of the Church of God as those are worthy of treatment that excludes any kind of unpleasant punishment, let alone something that would be the result of the anger of God. After all, God is a loving God and He would do such things to His beloved people. Needless to say, this is a terrible misconception of a just and righteous God, and a misperception of just how that God acts given situations like we see in this passage.
 6. Those consequences were not just a slap on the wrist.
 - Carrying the above thought onward, God, in the OT, frequently exercised what can only be categorized as hard punishment. We think, for instance of the captivities of both the North and the Southern Kingdoms in 733 BC for the Northern Kingdom to Assyria; and then 605 BC and again in 586 BC for Judah, the Southern Kingdom to Babylon.
 - No one would be so foolish as to say that either of these were in any way mild. Neither would they observe that this punishment should have been foregone or that God might have “overlooked” their ongoing, virtually constant disobedience.

- In any rate, the time Israel and Judah spent in captivity was not a slap on the wrist.
7. The expression of God’s anger extended far in both extent and experience.
 - We must also note that both the length of these captivities as well as Israel’s experience undergoing them was long and severe.
 - God, a number of the Prophets tell us, was angry with Israel and we must believe that He expressed that anger in an appropriate fashion, both as to length and experience.
 - This was surely the case as we see it in the Book of Judges.
 8. God provided a solution to the resulting fix they had gotten themselves into.
 - We also note that in all of the cases we see in Judges, as well as in the two captivities, God brought the punishment to an end. It was severe and long, but it ended.
 - In all cases God provided one who would do what was needful to bring them to an end. The different Judges, and those whom He used to give Israel favor with the heads of Assyria and Babylon and then to lead them back to the land demonstrate this.
 - Ultimately all of this was, of course, a picture of the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Man has gotten himself into a terrible problem that deserves and has guaranteed that God will cause punishment to fall upon him at the time of the judgment of all men. Just as there were solutions provided for Israel at the various times of their great need, so also there is a solution provided now for sinful men in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, obtained by grace through faith.

The time of the judges is a time in Israel’s history where chaos and individualism reigned. The following words are an accurate description of what was going on:

“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6).

In spite of this situation, the Lord demonstrated His mercy through the judges. Let’s examine three actions of the Lord.

First, the Lord raised up judges. A significant observation is that the judges were not voted in by the people; rather the Lord raised them up. God is the one who chose and backed up the judges. The Lord knew both what and whom the people truly needed. There is a great difference between a leader chosen by the people and chosen by God.

A leader chosen by the Lord if he/she kept his/her heart humble would have a great influence over the nation. The glory would go to the Lord and not the individual no matter how gifted one is.

Second, the Lord was with the judge. It is God's presence that ultimately is the deciding factor in the life of a leader. No matter how gifted and talented a judge may be, God's presence and guidance is the assurance of attaining a victory. In reality, we can say that this is spiritual authority. It transcends much more than what we see with our natural eyes. Spiritual authority is the component that gives a leader favor and influence before others. Again, the source is the Lord being with us.

Third, the Lord delivered the people through the judges. The surrounding nations oppressed God's people. When this situation developed, they would call on the Lord. It was then the Lord would choose a judge or judges to champion His cause in favor of the people. This happened many times. Samson, Deborah, Gideon are just some of the judges used by the Lord to free His people. What is heartrending is that a number of times, Israel abandoned the Lord after they received the victory.

In conclusion, the Lord raised up judges. The Lord was with the judge. And the Lord delivered the people through the judges.

Let's not overlook the fact of God's love in responding to the cry of His people. May we call and depend totally on the name of our Lord in the days of testing and not forget Him.